



“Lies” My Father Told Me

by Moshe ben Asher

Dad was always telling unbelievable stories of his youthful dare-devilry, which undoubtedly influenced my own addiction to KZ 550s, VF 500s and the like. But motorcycles were just a part of his "flaming youth."

In his teens he was going off the Montreal ski club's high jump. While I was something of a hot-dog downhill skier myself until a few years ago, ski jumping always struck me as indefensible lunacy.

He and a friend bought a World War I "Jenny" in a crate, assembled it and flew it. I suppose that at the time, for a boy from a nice middle-class, religious family, flying home-built airplanes was like dropping acid in the early 60s. His folks sent him to a shrink—an act of desperation—but he was always strong-willed, in a quiet way, and undeterred. Luckily he survived this phase of his thrill-seeking. The friend was killed in the bi-plane, but that didn't slow Dad down.

He grew up on Indians, Popes, and other esoteric-sounding machines that faded away long ago, except in the yellowed pages of old motorcycle magazines. But they never faded for him—they were a lifelong infusion of excitement and enthusiasm.

Before long he was riding "professionally"—*on the wall* in a circus! When as a boy I first heard the story, it didn't make sense to me. I just couldn't imagine how it was done. That understanding finally came in my own teen years at the Long Beach Pike—the amusement park on the pier—in the "barrel." Pinned to the wall of a spinning thirty-foot cylinder as the floor dropped out, I began to understand how it was possible to ride a motorcycle on a wall. But what madness! Who would be crazy enough to do it!?

Mom, despite her endless energy for keeping up order and appearances, accepted his riding in the same way she did his massive tool collection in the garage. A strong-willed and successful businesswoman in her own right, she wasn't about to seriously infringe on his lifelong predilection for two-

wheeled travel. In later years she did put the heat on him to wear a helmet, after he took a minor spill. Occasionally, in moments of resurgent romantic lightheadedness, she actually climbed aboard his last machine, a lively Suzuki 250 two-cycle, for a Sunday buzz around the marina and environs.

The family had listened to the stories of his youth for years, taking them only half-seriously. But one in particular intrigued me. It increasingly piqued my curiosity from the time I began riding 20 years ago. Picture a downtown Newark street in the '30s. My dad and friend are riding two-up. His idea of two-up: the friend is sitting on the tank piloting the bike, and Dad's standing up, his feet planted on the seat, his arms outstretched for balance, as the bike rolls along with traffic! As the story goes, a cop pulls them over and then takes them down to the station (presumably for sanity testing!).

Like I said, I grew up on this story. As I became a rider myself it captivated me more and more as a feat of daring and skill, not to mention madness. Rest assured, I had no fantasies of doing anything similar. No, the issue for me was whether all these stories were pure fabrication, innocent but misleading embroidering on the facts, or simply the plain truth. I tended toward the middle ground over the years.

Then one night a decade or so ago, stepping off the escalator in a Los Angeles department store with my father and mother, a stranger came up to us and asked my father's name and whether he remembered him. When my father said no, the man asked, "Don't you remember the day we were arrested in Newark 30 years ago when we were riding together, with you standing up on the motorcycle?" Cue the *Twilight Zone* theme.

After that I never doubted, and he never gave me reason to. My dad owned and rode a cycle all his life, right up to his death three years ago at age 78.